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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 001563

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STATE PASS TO EAP/MLS AND INR/EAP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: DISSIDENT ATTORNEY LE QUOC QUAN HIGHLIGHTS
CONSERVATIVE, PRO-REFORM STRUGGLE

REF: A. HANOI 1390

[1](#)B. 1360

[1](#)C. 1251

[1](#)D. 1131

[1](#)E. 1550

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Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Brian Aggeler for Reasons
1.4 (b), (c), and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (S) In an August 24 meeting with PolOffs, dissident Attorney Le Quoc Quan discussed the current dominance of conservatives in the Vietnamese government and the struggles for pro-reformists. Among those in the pro-reform camp, according to Quan, are Vietnam's two new Deputy Prime Ministers. Quan, who is unusually well-connected to pro-reform elements in the GVN, said the younger generation of generals in the military and security services is more likely to resist change and protect the dominant role of the Party, partly out of ideology and largely out of self-interest. Quan also discussed his ongoing police harassment and regular interrogations, which often focus on any relations with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the United States-based Vietnam Reform Party (AKA "VietTan"). Liberalization of the press is a key to encouraging reform, according to Quan. End Summary.

BACKGROUND: A JAILED FASCELL FELLOW

[1](#)2. (C) Vietnamese Attorney Le Quoc Quan was a 2006-2007 Reagan-Fascell Fellow, sponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). He spent more than four months in the United States conducting research on civil society, democracy and legal issues. Upon his return to Vietnam in March 2007, he was arrested and imprisoned. Under significant pressure from the USG and Mission Hanoi, Quan was released from detention in June 2007 (Ref. D). He remains "under investigation," a form of house arrest with ongoing police surveillance, and is subject to re-arrest at anytime. In addition, he has been disbarred and cannot earn a living as an attorney. Despite this, Attorney Quan remains in regular contact with the Embassy Political Section and is active in the underground democracy movement in Vietnam. A legal

expert, Attorney Quan is fighting his disbarment and remains in regular contact with the Hanoi Bar Association. According to Quan, many of the Bar's members support him. Unlike many other dissidents who are kept at a safe distance, Quan and his wife are able to maintain some contacts with those in positions of power in the GVN.

13. (C) The preferred mode of communication for Vietnamese dissidents is "Skype," (the Voice-over-Internet-Protocol system) and "GMAIL" (using an alias), which is reportedly more difficult for Ministry of Public Security (MPS) agents to hack. Often-changed cellular phones are also used. While Emboff's August 24 meeting with Le Quoc Quan took place unimpeded in a hotel restaurant, an MPS agent followed Quan from his home and sat in the distance. Quan was called in for questioning after the last time he met Emboffs (Ref. C), and he will likely be called in after this meeting. Nevertheless, Quan continues to request meetings with Emboffs.

GVN SECURITY OBSESSED WITH NED AND THE VIET TAN PARTY

14. (C) Quan opened the August 24 meeting with PolOffs by stating how important it is to maintain direct access to U.S. Embassy officials and share information on human rights issues of concern. He mentioned, matter-of-fact, that he had been asked to report to a local police station three times since a previous meeting with Poloffs in early July (Ref. C). Quan told us that security officials are obsessed with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the time that Quan spent back in the States as a NED fellow. During his interrogation sessions with security officials, Quan is often asked, "tell us the things that NED showed you to overthrow the Vietnamese government?" Quan said that these officials

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believe NED intends to use its contacts in Vietnam to destabilize the country "like it did in Tianamen Square and the color revolutions in Europe." He added that GVN security officials have told him that they "have agents everywhere" including people inside NED. Quan finds this hard to believe and asked security officials to elaborate during one of their sessions. According to Quan, all the information discussed by security officials can be obtained directly from the NED website.

15. (C) Quan has been in contact with NED officials back in Washington DC, including NED President, Carl Gershwin. During a recent conversation with Gershwin over Skype, Gershwin stated that he is considering making a trip to Vietnam to meet with officials and let them know the purpose of Quan's fellowship and NED's true mission in Vietnam. Quan is hopeful that Gershwin will make a visit and request Embassy assistance in setting up meetings if a trip is scheduled.

16. (C) During his interrogation sessions, Quan was also asked about his connection to the Viet Tan Party (VTP). GVN officials are closely monitoring VTP websites and are concerned with funding that is coming from overseas Vietnamese being used to sponsor dissident groups in Vietnam. Officials are equally worried about the new generation of human rights dissidents and have asked Quan to forget about promoting democracy and "go back to being a lawyer."

HARDLINERS VS. PRO-REFORMISTS IN GVN

17. (S) Quan told us the struggle between conservatives and pro-reform elements within the GVN became evident in a recent internal debate, in the Politburo and Central Party

Committee, on "press privatization" and press freedom. He said one of the reasons the international community had seen rollbacks on press freedom in Vietnam in 2007 is the ascension of hard-liner Le Doan Hop, Minister of Information and Communication. Quan said another hardliner is Ho Duc Viet, Politburo member and Chairman of Personnel and Organization of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), who is particularly powerful because he largely controls government appointments. According to Quan, these conservative elements dominate the GVN, and outnumber the pro-reformists.

¶18. (S) Among those considered pro-reformist, according to Quan, are the two new Deputy Prime Ministers, Nguyen Thien Nhan and Hoang Trung Hai (Ref. E) (Note: Vietnam recently added two new Deputy Prime Ministerships, going from three to five, with support from Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. End note.). Quan said one of his best sources of information on the inner workings of the GVN is his close friend Le Dinh Ba, the Executive Assistant of new DPM Hai, whose portfolio covers industry and commerce. Ba attended Law School at the University of Wisconsin, and is "friendly to" the United States, according to Quan. Quan said Ba has had some problems recently due to their friendship, and Ba was even questioned by the police when Quan was arrested. Ba must now keep more distance from Quan. Quan added that Ba is an "old flame" of the daughter of Communist Party Secretary Nong Duc Manh, which reportedly adds to his problems.

¶19. (S) Quan said another pro-reformist with whom he is in contact is Office of National Assembly (ONA) Vice-Chairman Nguyen Si Dung. According to Quan, Dung was also questioned by police after Quan's arrest in March 2007. Dung is a regular contact of the Embassy, and told us before the May National Assembly elections that he was bitter over the Party's denial of his National Assembly delegate candidacy.

INDOCTRINATED YOUNGER GENERATION OF GENERALS PROTECT REGIME

¶10. (S) When asked to comment on reports about pro-China versus pro-West camps in the GVN leadership, Quan said the conservatives are not necessarily pro-China as the Vietnamese inherently distrust China; rather, their mission is to ensure the continuation of the Party and its hold on power. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) are inherently conservative elements, specifically

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tasked to ensure the stability and continuation of the Hanoi regime. Quan said the new post-war generation of "young generals" in MOD and MPS is considered even more conservative than the older, current war-generation leadership. This new generation of generals has been specifically and carefully chosen and indoctrinated to protect the Party, ensure stability, and protect and promote themselves while the older, war-generation is known to talk more openly about departures from the past. He cited, as an example of the war-generation, 60-year-old MPS Vice-Minister Nguyen Van Huong (Ref. A) who, according to Quan, is less conservative than the younger generals. Quan said the struggle for the pro-reformists is that they speak out independently but are unable to collectively.

PRESS FREEDOM, CIVIL SOCIETY CRITICAL TO FUTURE GVN REFORM

¶11. (C) Quan sees liberalization of the press as critical to freeing up Vietnamese society, because of the role of the younger generation in society and this demographic's struggle with the indoctrinated government hard-liners. He also said passage of the draft Law on Associations, a key bill that

would liberalize civil society and develop the NGO sector but that is now over ten years in draft stage, is also extremely important. Although the conservatives are threatened by this legislation, Quan still believes it could be passed in mid-2008.

COMMENT: DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT AS STRONG AS EVER

¶12. (S) Attorney Quan, an expert in the GVN judicial system, is active in the "Hanoi chapter" of Vietnam's underground democracy movement. He is in regular contact with other leading dissidents, including Pham Hong Son and Nguyen Vu Binh and family members of imprisoned dissident attorneys Le Nguyen Sang, Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan. We cannot confirm all of Quan's views on the GVN leadership, but he does appear to have unique connections to some key individuals in the GVN leadership. Quan runs a significant risk of re-arrest but, while the crackdown on dissent continues in Vietnam, the underground democracy movement continues and indeed perhaps bolder than ever.

MICHALAK